

ARMY MAGAZINE

BASOPS in USAREUR: AN AREA SUPPORT GROUP PERSPECTIVE

BY COL. GERALD E. FERGUSON JR.

Nothing better illustrates the U.S. Army's theme of "taking care of its own" than the current base operations (BASOPS) support system in U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR). More than 100,000 soldiers, civilians and family members from northern Europe, Germany, Italy and the Balkans receive support from a mixed force of active and reserve component soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, nonappropriated fund employees, local national employees and contractors organized into seven area support groups (ASGs) and 14 subordinate base support battalions (BSBs).

Daily installation management is conducted between USAREUR/Seventh Army headquarters staff offices and the support groups. The USAREUR staff provides broad program management directives, quality-of-life standards for installation support functions, and guidance and assistance to supporting installations. It directly coordinates routine installation support with the ASGs.

Each ASG provides program policy and general supervision for installation support in its assigned area of responsibility. The ASG organizational structure consists of the command element, special and personal staff, functional staff directorates and assigned BSBs.

The BSBs execute installation support programs. They maintain property and provide daily services to local residents. The basic BSB organization consists of a command element, limited special and personal staff and directorate execution staff. Like the ASGs, BSBs receive direction from the Department of the Army and USAREUR publications, program budget guidance and their higher headquarters.

Depending on geographic or population dispersion, area support teams may be formed. The area support team is similar to a continental U.S. subinstallation. It provides local residents with daily on-site or on-call basic services.

One example of an area support group is the 98th ASG, headquartered in Wuerzburg, Germany. It provides such BASOPS support as quality-of-life programs, resource management, combat service



support, terrain management, local training area management, movement control, and damage control and recovery for more than 43,000 soldiers, civilians and family members on 34 installations in a 19,000-square-kilometer area of northern Bavaria.

A quick glance at some of the numbers involved in providing this support gives an idea of the mission and complexity involved: an appropriated-fund budget of more than \$230 million; \$17 million of nonappropriated income; 31 million square feet of real property; more than 4,000 sets of government quarters; 3,000 leased quarters; 75 morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) facilities; 40 ranges; 35 local training areas; and 49,000 acres of training land.

The 98th ASG executes its mission with a 3,000-employee workforce. Those entrusted to carry out the mission consist of about 8 percent military, 50 percent U.S. civilian and 42 percent local national employees. Both the U.S. and local national civilians are professionals trained in BASOPS. The relatively few military personnel are concentrated primarily in command, control and leadership positions.

Routine challenges are exacerbated when serving military needs in a densely populated, non-English speaking, country thousands of miles from the United States. Although the U.S. Army enjoys an excellent working relationship with its host nation and a Status of Forces Agreement is in place, ever-changing German and European Union labor, environmental and construction laws and regulations add layers of complexity to an already complicated support matrix.

Four base support battalions are assigned to the 98th ASG. The 235th BSB provides support to the Ansbach/Katterbach and Illesheim areas. Tenant units are V Corps and 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized) aviation brigades and a V Corps air defense artillery battalion. The 279th BSB is located in Bamberg with a heavy concentration of engineer and field artillery units. Schweinfurt is the home of the 280th BSB and the 1st Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team and 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry. The 417th BSB calls the Kitzingen, Giebelstadt and Wuerzburg area home. The most geographically dispersed, the 417th also supports the most diverse range of tenant units, from 1st Infantry Division Headquarters to division troops, corps aviation battalions and USAREUR-level signal units. The area is also home to the 67th Combat Support Hospital and the largest Army and Air Force Exchange Service shopping facility in Europe.

The areas of MWR, housing and billeting, and deployment support have the greatest visible impact on those living within the BSB footprint. MWR programs and facilities have a direct impact on the day-to-day perceived well-being of soldiers and their families. These programs range from youth activities and physical fitness centers to clubs and automobile service areas. Although some funding comes from higher headquarters, many of these programs and facilities depend on profits generated by customer use. If they do not operate at a profit or break even, they may be in danger of closing.

Measuring the profitability of many of the activities and programs at the heart of MWR poses one of the most complex challenges to BSB commanders and their staffs today. Commanders have to set priorities for the resources available based on greatest payoff and community needs. The perceived disparity in the range of activities and programs between less and more populated communities can often lead to a "have/have not" attitude among members of smaller communities that can directly influence soldier retention and readiness.

Another cornerstone of soldier and family well-being is housing. The BSBs acquire and maintain a wide

array of housing. Ninety-five percent of families are housed within 30 days of arrival. Forty-six percent of the ASG inventory is on-post housing, mainly 3- or 4-story stairwell walkups built in the 1950s with heavy masonry style construction. The vast majority of these stairwell apartments have only one bathroom regardless of the number of bedrooms.

The ASG, along with the rest of the Army, is executing a 12-year program to bring Army family housing up to a higher standard. The ASG's bill for this program is estimated to be \$418 million. Single soldier billets are also in the midst of a modernization program that would give junior enlisted soldiers their own room with a shared bath and kitchenette. The Department of the Army goal for upgrading all buildings is fiscal year 2008, with approximately 8,250 billet spaces being renovated in the 98th ASG.

The third major area affecting quality of life of soldiers and their families is deployment support. BSBs are responsible for providing the physical platform (railheads, airfields and more) for force projection and deployment. In this respect, there is little difference between deploying tenant units to Grafenwoehr for training or to Bosnia to support ongoing contingency operations.

Families left behind need support provided through family support groups of the deployed units. The base support battalion commands set up family assistance centers and stock them with telephone, fax and Internet connections. The centers also serve as a single point of contact for family members to seek help for specific needs such as finance and housing. Depending on the size and intensity of the deployment, the centers can be manned 24 hours a day. They are certified annually by USAREUR.

Army performance improvement criteria help BSB commanders focus their efforts and resources. Through research of their customer base and constant feedback, communities have identified and funded high payoff programs and activities. BSBs received cash awards totaling \$1.6 million during the last three years to fund local quality-of-life projects.

As it moves into the 21st century, the Army cannot continue to do business as it has in the past. Requirements grow as resources become more constrained. Every facet of BASOPS must be examined to see how it can most efficiently provide the required services. As such, a USAREUR study will examine the 222nd BSB in Baumholder, a subordinate unit of the 104th ASG, and the 98th ASG to develop, in conjunction with the workforce, the most efficient organization to deliver BASOPS services at the least cost.

Similar to the A-76 studies conducted in the continental United States, the USAREUR study will evaluate the efficiency of the ASG -- from housing to vehicle registration to bowling centers to childcare.

The intent is to restructure the existing organization using the current workforce whenever possible and outsourcing functions, where feasible. At the end of the study, the Army will have a prototype of a more efficient organization to deliver the required services and support.

As long as the U.S. Army remains in Europe, base operations will be key to mission readiness, retention and quality of life. USAREUR and the 98th Area Support Group are committed to providing the most efficient and comprehensive support possible to those who are on-point for the nation.

COL. GERALD E. FERGUSON JR. commands the 98th Area Support Group (ASG) in Wuerzburg, Germany. The 98th ASG provides support to units of U.S. Army Europe, V Corps and the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized).

[**Return to ARMY Magazine home page**](#)